

A4 Fig. 3 is a front plan view of the input station of the device of Fig. 1, representing certain parts of the invention.

In Paragraph [0019], please substitute the paragraph as follows:

A5 Figs. 4a and 4b are side plan views of the input station of the device of Fig. 1, illustrated in two different conditions, some of the parts being shown in transparency.

In Paragraph [0020], please substitute the paragraph as follows:

A6 Fig. 5 is another schematic view of Fig. 3, showing other parts of the invention.

In Paragraph [0021], please substitute the paragraph as follows:

A7 Fig. 6 is a top view of the output station of the device of Fig. 1.

In Paragraph [0022], please substitute the paragraph as follows:

A8 Fig. 7 is a top view illustrating the operating principle of the means shown in Fig. 6.

IN THE CLAIMS

In Claim 1, please substitute the claim as follows:

A9 1. (Amended) Process for the on-line storage of sets (2) of flat products (1) such as, in particular, disposable liners or sanitary napkins, comprising transporting said products between one or more input stations (3) and one or more output stations (4);

introducing said sets at a given arrival rate at said input station or stations (3) between pressing means (6), capable of moving with said sets, said pressing means (6) being in a first, so-called open, configuration,

pressing said products against one another by causing said pressing means (6) to change over from their open configuration to a second, so-called product holding, configuration, and

directing said sets towards said output station or stations (4) at which they are ejected, at a given output rate, adapted as a function of the input rate, to manage an accumulation of sets between said input station or stations (3) and said output station or stations (4).

In Claim 3, please substitute the claim as follows:

A10 3. (Amended) Process according to Claim 1, wherein said sets are caused to travel between said input station or stations (3) and said output station or stations (4) along a path the length of which is variable as a function of the input and/or output rate, to manage said accumulation.

In Claim 4, please substitute the claim as follows:

A11 4. (Amended) Process according to Claim 1, further comprising a stream of sets of variable size and said holding configuration being adapted according to the size of the sets to be conveyed.

In Claim 5, please substitute the claim as follows:

A12 5. (Amended) Device for the on-line storage of sets of flat products such as, in particular, disposable liners or periodic napkins, comprising one or more input stations (3), one or more output stations (4), means (8) for conveying said sets between said input station or stations (3) and said output station or stations (4),

pressing means (6), capable of moving with said set conveying means (8), said pressing means (6) being capable of changing over from a first, so-called open, configuration, permitting introduction of the sets into said conveying means (8) at a given input rate, to a second, or so-called product holding configuration, in which the products are pressed against one another,

means (10) for causing said pressing means (6) to change over from their open configuration to their product holding configuration, provided at said input station or stations,

means (7) for ejecting the sets, provided at said output station or stations for the departure of the sets at a given output rate, and

means (9) for generating an accumulation of the sets between the input station or stations (3) and the output station or stations (4), as a function of the input and/or output rate.

In Claim 6, please substitute the claim as follows:

A13 6. (Amended) Device according to claim 5, wherein said conveying means (8) take a looped path, said device further comprising means for causing said pressing means (6) to change over from their product holding configuration to their open configuration, provided, in the direction of progress of the conveying means, between said output station or stations (4) and/or said input station or stations (3) and/or in the area thereof.

In Claim 8, please substitute the claim as follows:

A14 8. (Amended) Device according to claim 5, further comprising :
a conveying means (8) comprising a plurality of pods (11), each said pod (11) being capable of accommodating at least one said set,

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a pressing means (6) being comprised of two carriages (15) sliding in the same, so-called clamping, direction (17), on said pod (11) and means (16) for holding said carriages spaced apart by a given distance.

In Claim 9, please substitute the claim as follows:

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9. (Amended) Device according to claim 8, wherein said means (16) for holding the carriages (15) are comprised of first and second blocking means (22a, 22b) capable of engaging with one another, the first blocking means (22a) being secured to said carriage (15) and said second blocking means (22b) being articulated in relation to said car (11), and locking means (23), borne by the pod (11), said locking means (23) being capable of forcing the engagement of said second blocking means (22b) with said first blocking means (22a).

In Claim 10, please substitute the claim as follows:

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10. (Amended) Device according to claim 9, wherein said means (10) for causing said pressing means (6) to change over from their open configuration to their product holding configuration comprise:

at least a first jack (30), secured to an armature (31) fixed in relation to which the pods (11) travel, said first jack or jacks (30) being capable of acting upon said locking means (23) to disengage said first and second blocking means (22a, 22b) and leave them free in relation to one another, and

second jacks (32) secured to said fixed armature (31), said second jacks (32) being capable of causing said carriages (15) to slide in said clamping direction (17) between said open configuration and said product holding configuration.

In Claim 11, please substitute the claim as follows:

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11. (Amended) Device according to claim 10, further comprising means (36) for adapting said product holding configuration.

In Claim 12, please substitute the claim as follows:

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12. (Amended) Device according to claim 11, wherein said means (36) for adapting the product holding configuration are comprised of stops (37), mobile in relation to said fixed armature (31), said stops (37) being capable of limiting the travel of said second jacks (32) so as to adjust the minimum spacing of said carriages (15).

In Claim 13, please substitute the claim as follows:

A19 13. (Amended) Device according to claim 5, wherein said ejection means (7) comprise a thrust bearing (44) and means for displacing said stop in a first direction (45), the latter means being comprised of means (46) capable of generating a force in a second direction (47), substantially perpendicular to said first direction (45) and means (48) for transmitting said force, cooperating with said stop (44).

In Claim 14, please substitute the claim as follows:

A20 14. (Amended) Device according to claim 13, wherein said transmission means (48) are comprised of two arms (49) forming the two equal sides of an isosceles triangle (50) the axis of symmetry of which is defined by said first direction (45), and means for bringing together/separating said arms (49) by deforming said triangle (50) while preserving its characteristics as an isosceles triangle and the orientation of its axis of symmetry.

In Claim 16, please substitute the claim as follows:

A21 16. (Amended) Device according to claim 15, wherein said means (46) for generating a force are comprised of at least one jack (55) driving, directly or indirectly, said skids (54).

In Claim 17, please substitute the claim as follows:

A22 17. (Amended) Device according to claim 16, wherein said means (9) for managing an accumulation of sets are comprised of means for varying the length of the path taken by said transport means (8).

In Claim 18, please substitute the claim as follows:

A23 18. (Amended) Device according to claim 17, wherein said conveying means (8) comprise at least one belt (12) forming a loop of a fixed length and wherein said means for varying the length of the path comprises

a first pair of so-called driving drums (56a, 56b), serving to drive said belt (12),
means for actuating said driving drums (56a, 56b) capable of operating them at two
respective separate speeds, and

a second pair of drums (58a, 58b) about which the belt (12) travels; the first (58a) and the second (58b) drums of said second pair being respectively provided between the first (56a) and the second (56b) driving drums and between the second (56b) and the first (56a) driving drums, according to the direction of travel of said belt (12), said first (58a) and second (58b) drums of said